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Visions of the future: imagining Islamic modernities in Indonesian Islamic-themed post-Suharto popular and visual culture

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Citation for published version (APA):

Schmidt, L. K. (2014). Visions of the future: imagining Islamic modernities in Indonesian Islamic-themed post-Suharto popular and visual culture.

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English summary

Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population and in the midst of modernization and Islamization. This confronts Indonesian Muslims with the questions what it means to be modern and Muslim, and whether or not Indonesia is on the 'right' path toward the 'right' kind of modernity. Popular and visual culture provides perfect tools to reflect on these questions and to publicly fantasize modernities. Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual cultural products both display and construct Islamic modernities, thereby feeding into a global future of the Islam and offering visions of these futures. In my study, I zoom in on these products and ask how Islamic modernities and futures are imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture.

Islamic-themed popular and visual culture is a relatively new phenomenon in Indonesia as expressions of religion in popular culture were banned during the Suharto regime (1966-1998). Now, in the post-Suharto era (1998-), Indonesia's large Muslim community takes advantage of the newly liberated public sphere to participate in public discourses related to the alleged path of modernity. Simultaneously, entrepreneurs imbue cultural products with religious as well as economic value. The dialectics between a public Islamic revival and a commodification of Islam results in a booming Indonesian Islamic popular and visual cultural sphere, that is a key site to experiment with Islamic modernities, a site where global modern Islamic futures are imagined, negotiated, and contested.

These futures display a strong consciousness of global (negative) discourses of the Islam, which are circulating in our post-9/11 world. Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture offers Muslims constructive solutions while showing how religiosity, openness, tolerance, and modernity go hand in hand. I suggest that this specific version of an Indonesian Islamic modernity may in the end be the best defense against reactionary radicalism. In Indonesia, the widening gap between the rich and the poor is helping the recruitment for radical Islamic groups – although these groups are often very vocal, they do not appeal to large segments of the population (cf. Hefner 2009; Van Bruinessen 2002). A version of modernity that promotes piety and that avoids radical orthodoxy may here provide a fruitful alternative for a modern future of the Islam.

But Islamic-themed popular and visual culture not merely displays visions of global modern Islamic futures. Since it is targeted at the *generasi muda Islam*, Indonesia's 'next generation' of urban middle class Muslim youngsters, it plays a key

role in the aspired Islamization of Indonesia and the shaping of a modern Muslim nation.

Chapter overview					
Chapter	2	3	4	5	6
Sphere	Leisure sphere	Media sphere	Media sphere	Media sphere	Creative sphere
Objects	Shopping malls - Plaza Ambarrukmo - Mal Malioboro - Galeria Mall - Sapphire Square	Rock music <i>Gigi</i> : - <i>Tuhan</i> (2004) - <i>Perdamaian</i> (2005) - <i>Nationalism</i> (2009)	Self-help books - <i>Wonderful Family</i> (2012) - <i>Rasullulah's Business School</i> (2011) - <i>Twitografi Asma Nadia</i> (2011)	Films - <i>Berbagi Suami</i> (2006) - <i>Virgin</i> (2004) - <i>Ayat-Ayat Cinta</i> (2008)	Contemporary art - <i>Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat</i> (2009) - <i>11 June 2002</i> (2003)
Theme	Consumption, space	Nation(alism)	Subjectivity	Gender	Geopolitics
Theory, Concepts	- Production of space (Lefebvre) - Heterotopia (Foucault)	Imagination (Appadurai)	Governmentality (Foucault)	Biopolitics (Foucault)	- Ur-history (Benjamin) - <i>Lieux de mémoire</i> (Nora) - Distribution of the sensible (Rancière)

Figure 1: chapter overview

Modernity and modernization are rather abstract concepts. To make these concepts more tangible, I take one middle class Muslim girl's encounters with modernity as a lead in selecting case studies. I identified three 'spheres' in which her negotiations with modernity take place: the leisure sphere, the media sphere, and the creative sphere. I selected five case studies (see also Figure 1) that take place in these spheres and that I examine for their engagement with modernities. These case studies are: (visual decorations in) the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan, Islamic rock music, Islamic self-help books, Islamic-themed films, and contemporary Islamic-themed art. I propose that these case studies form sites for creative

experiments with Islamic modernities, but simultaneously constitute sites that attempt to discipline people into desired modern citizens that are fit to participate in globalized Indonesian modernities. I also propose that Islamic-themed popular and visual culture negotiates different styles of modernities, and that these negotiations must be understood in the context of Indonesia's postcoloniality and in the context of our current global condition.

Chapter 2

Urban Islamic spectacles: transforming the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan

As the intersections of Islam with consumption and capitalism are central to Islamic-themed popular culture, I start by exploring this junction. I do so through analyzing (visual decorations in) the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan.

In recent years, the holy month of Ramadan has in Indonesia allegedly shifted from a period of piety to a euphoric spectacle of consumerism. This shift can be observed in the remarkable transformations that urban spaces of Indonesian cities undergo during Ramadan. Drawing on fieldwork data, thereby particularly focusing on the space of the shopping mall, this chapter analyses how space is produced (cf. Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) and transformed during Ramadan. I suggest that space is not an inert stage where modernity is performed, but that space is instead an active participant in producing and fantasizing Islamic modernities. In this chapter, I also point out that visual culture plays a notable role in the transformation of space during Ramadan. I show how Islam, through discursive representations, carves out a public space of its own. The production of space is charged with ideological symbols and moves through social imaginations.

I suggest that the case study of Ramadan enables a critical reading of two themes that can be recognized in previous studies concerned with the production of space: (1) the separation of space and time, and (2) the linear production of space. Through theorizing the space of the mall as a heterotopia (cf. Foucault 1986 [1967]) and Ramadan as a specific heterotopic moment, I propose a conceptual model that systematically integrates time in the study of space and that can help to study non-linear spatial productions.

Chapter 3

'A place where grace and sins collide': Islamic rock music and imaginations of modernity

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on three of the largest outlets of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture: music, self-help books, and film. In chapter 3, I look at Islamic rock music.

In Indonesia's post-authoritarian mediasphere, Islamic piety and coolness by no means exclude each other. Today Islam has found its place in an urban youth culture that places 'coolness' as its core value. The Indonesian rock band *Gigi* represents this new 'coolness' in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular culture. By taking *Gigi* as a case study, and by analyzing three of their music videos, I explore how Islamic popular culture engages in debates about the desired course of modernity, and how it forms an arena where Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated, and contested. In this chapter, I particularly zoom in on the following questions: In what kinds of debates does Islamic popular culture participate? What kinds of modernities does it imagine? How 'Indonesian' are these modernities? What transnational imaginations and politics underpin their construction? Through my analysis, I also raise questions about the 'capacities' of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. How to view Islamic-themed popular and visual cultural products? Do they constitute sites of creative experimentation and contestation, or do they attempt to discipline people into responsible modern citizens? Or do both apply? By drawing on Arjun Appadurai's (2004; 2013) ideas about cultural capacities, I show that in the ways *Gigi* imagines Islamic modernities, their music gives way to an 'ethics of possibility' and an 'ethics of probability' (cf. Appadurai 2013: 188). This means that on the one hand, popular culture provides the tools to imagine, fantasize, and stimulate the coming into being of desired Islamic modernities, but that on the other hand, these constructions are never free from relations of power.

Chapter 4

'How to become a Muslim billionaire, just like Prophet Muhammad?': Self-help gurus and governmentality

In chapter 4, I study Islamic self-help books. Central to this chapter is not so much the question what kinds of modernities are imagined, but rather what 'ideal' modern Muslim subjects are imagined and promoted through Islamic-themed popular culture.

The global Islamic revival of the last three decades has in Indonesia fragmented traditional forms of religious authority whilst producing new figures of public piety (Hoesterey 2012: 38). Recently, Indonesia has seen a boom of Islamic self-help literature. Through Islamic self-help books, pop culture preachers and self-help gurus offer Islamic guidance to Indonesian Muslims. In this chapter, I will analyze three books: *Wonderful Family* (2012), *Rasullulah's Business School* (2011), and *Twitografi Asma Nadia* (2011). I explore how these books provide families, entrepreneurs, and young women with inspirational stories and practical manuals for living in a modernizing Indonesian society. I suggest that while 'helping' readers, the books mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct specific modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. I propose that these subjects are not just gesturing towards a distant modern future. Rather they point our gaze back to the disputes and contradictions that exist in a present Indonesian society. The books encourage the construction of subjects that are aware of, and that intervene in, the (unequal) spread of wealth, while actively negotiating cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

Chapter 5

'So Islam really honors women?': Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

In chapter 5, I study how the questions raised in chapter 4 are gendered. I do so by looking at Islamic-themed films. Representations of gender in Islamic-themed films have in the past few years stirred national debates about polygamy, the position of women in Islam, sexuality, and domestic violence. In this chapter, I critically scrutinize these representations. I suggest that we need to view these representations in the light of Indonesia's recent history. During Suharto's New Order, representations of masculinity and femininity were part of the regime's national project, and as such served a national function. State sponsored media products linked good citizenship for women to good domestic qualities, thereby creating highly stereotypical images of women. The fall of the New Order regime opened up a space for identity politics, and for a critical attitude toward New Order gender stereotypes, although regulation and (self) censorship continue to exist today. The newly liberalized cultural scene nevertheless provides ample opportunities for the creative industry to construct different representations of gender, and to tackle taboo-issues, like sexuality, polygamy, and (domestic) violence.

But how are representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity in post-New

Order Islamic-themed cinema constructed? How do these constructions negotiate 'sensitive' topics like polygamy, sexuality, and (domestic) violence? How do they compare to their New Order counterparts? And do these constructions also serve a specific national function?

In this chapter, I explore these questions through analyzing three post-New Order Islamic-themed films. These films; *Berbagi Suami* (Love for share, 2006), *Virgin* (2004), and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of love, 2008) all engage with 'sensitive' issues. By drawing on Michel Foucault's (1975-1976 [2003]) notion of biopolitics, I suggest that the sensitivities portrayed in these films are closely linked to anxieties that come with processes of modernization, and that it is through the representation of gender that modernity is negotiated. I propose that post-New Order representations of masculinity and femininity obtain their own national function; they negotiate 'right' male and female modern identities in an era of modernization.

Chapter 6

Unearthing the past and re-imagining the present: Contemporary art and Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world

In this chapter, I look at Islamic-themed contemporary art. After 9/11, popular and academic discourses have often constructed Islamic communities as hostile to visual culture. Contemporary Indonesian art shows how visual culture is a site of (Muslim) politics, creativity, contestation, and conflict, a site where issues associated with Islam are mobilized to come to terms with the present state of the world. But how are aesthetics in these artworks mobilized as a way of negotiating and contesting political, cultural, and historical circumstances? How are politics and aesthetics (Rancière 2004) intertwined? What kind of critique is articulated and what tactics are employed here? And how might we understand these politics? Is it possible to read these politics of (Islamic) aesthetics as resistance? If so, how is this resistance structured? And how is being critical a part of being modern?

In this chapter, I explore these questions by analyzing two art works: *Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat* (2009) by Wilman Syanur and *11 June 2002* (2003) by Arahmaiani. Through conducting a visual analysis of these art works, I propose that a Benjaminian socio-historical politics underlies the objects' aesthetic strategies. Drawing on the works of Walter Benjamin (1999 [1982]; 1968 [1940]) and Pierre Nora (1996 [1989]), I suggest that through their aesthetics the works evoke fragments from the past to question the construct of the present. The works keenly fragment the past and translate these fragments into images. These visual historical

fragments are reassembled within the present to challenge present (dominant) narratives that are antithetical to Muslims. I suggest that these aesthetic strategies form the base of a (Muslim) politics.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Changing paths

In the conclusion, I first revisit the question that I ask in the introduction: “How are Islamic modernities imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture?” I also explore a question that I think is equally important: why are these modernities imagined? I suggest that the case studies construct a highly ambivalent discourse about modernity and about an Islamic modern future. On the one hand, the case studies display a positive attitude towards modernity. On the other hand, the case studies also articulate a negative attitude towards modernity, and express a fear and skepticism over the condition of the present. I propose that we can understand this ambiguous discourse by seeing it in the light of Indonesia’s postcoloniality and in the context of our current global condition.

To study how Islamic modernities are imagined in Indonesian popular and visual culture, I look at a wide range of different cultural products and forms: shopping malls, rock music, self-help books, films, and contemporary art. In the conclusion, I reflect on the question how the different forms of these case studies matter in the ways they imagine modernities. How do the means of mediation, e.g. different genres, media and visualities matter when it comes to the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of Islamic modernities?

The question ‘where are we going?’ is central to the rock songs, films, self-help books, malls, and art works that I analyze in my dissertation. Throughout my dissertation, the ‘we’ in this sentence stands for Indonesia, the modern Muslim nation, and the global Muslim world. In the conclusion, I make this ‘we’ stand for ‘scholarship’, and think about where scholarship at the intersections of modernities, Indonesia, and Islam could go in the future. Taking cues from my case studies, I present a future research agenda and suggest four directions that research could take. I summarize these directions under the headings: audiences, bodies, spaces, and flows.